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A Madman's Diary

By *Lu Xun (1881 - 1936)* Translated by *Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang*

Read by: Douglas Harvey Language: English
 Length: 32 minutes Style: Solo
 Genre(s): Fiction, Short Fiction,

Product Formats and Options

Format	Package	Catalog	EAN/UPC	MSLP
MP3 CD	DVD case	DB-6022	0687700170655	\$7.99
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“A Madman’s Diary” is a short story by Lu Xun first published in 1918. Written in vernacular Chinese, it is considered “China’s first modern short story” and the most influential modern work in the republican era. Lu was inspired by “Diary of a Madman by Nicolai Gogol, both in the use of the diary form and in the idea that the madman sees things more clearly than others. The comes about when the narrator decides to visit two friends with whom he has lost touch when he learns that one of them has fallen ill. When he arrives, he is met by the brother, who informs him that his brother is no longer ill and hands him a copy of his brother’s diary. It is immediately apparent that the diarist is indeed mad. He believes he is surrounded by cannibals and that everyone has cannibalistic designs on him. His paranoia grows and he begins to see threats everywhere. He even sees the words “Eat People” between the lines of classic Confucian texts. He eventually suspects that his late sister had been eaten by his brother, and that he himself may have unknowingly done so. He ardently hopes that everyone will have a change of heart and change their ways. The story ends with a plea to “save the children”.

The story is not readily comprehensible, and it took several years for it to be recognized as important. Gradually the madman came to be seen as a revolutionary contemptuous of Chinese tradition and its feudal society that “eats people”, people who themselves are corrupted by traditions they cannot escape.

Lu Xun is the pen name of Zhou Shuren (September 25, 1881 – October 19, 1936), a Chinese writer who was a leading figure in modern Chinese literature. He was born into a once prosperous family whose fortunes declined during his youth, which forced him to attend government-funded schools instead of pursuing the imperial civil service exam typical of his class. He attended medical school in Japan on scholarship but dropped out and returned to China due to lack of funds. During this time his earliest essays and his translations of influential Western novels were published. In 1906 he consented to an arranged marriage to an illiterate woman who he supported financially but physically abandoned. He worked as a teacher in secondary schools and colleges before finding a position at the Republic of China Ministry of Education. Publication of “A Madman’s Diary” in New Youth magazine in 1918 was met with praise and recognition as a leading figure in the New Culture Movement. Lu was a candidate for the 1927 Nobel Prize in Literature, but he rejected the nomination. At about this time, he renounced writing fiction in response to the deteriorating political situation in China, restricting himself to writing essays. Mao Zedong was a lifelong fan of his work, calling him “the saint of modern China”. He was acclaimed by the Chinese government after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. While sympathetic to socialist causes, he never joined the Communist Party of China. Lu Xun was a heavy smoker and eventually developed chronic tuberculosis. He died from respiratory failure in Shanghai on October 19, 1936.